Remembering fascism

Polyphony and its absence in contemporary Italian-Scottish and Italian-Welsh narrative

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Abstract

This article brings together recent scholarship on the re-memorializing of World War Two and fascism across Europe, particularly in the Italian context, and historical analysis of the British-Italian experience of the war and preceding growth of fascism. Building on Ugolini's 2011 questioning of whether the Italian-Scottish community has been romanticized, it proposes a new line of inquiry into the ways in which the changing memories are articulated in cultural production, focusing on a comparative analysis of Italian-Welsh and Italian-Scottish writing in a sustained way for the first time. Drawing on Bakhtin's (2002) concepts of polyphony and heteroglossia, the article analyses whether the voices which populate recent texts permit the emergence of a multiplicity of languages and ideologies, challenging the dominant narrative of the British-Italian experience of interwar fascistization and World War Two that has prevailed since 1945.

Keywords: Arandora Star, Arcari, Conti, fascism, Italian-Scottish, Italian-Welsh, memory, polyphony

This article brings together recent scholarship on the re-memorializing of World War Two and fascism across Europe, particularly in the Italian context, and provides a historical analysis of the British-Italian experience of the war and preceding growth of fascism.[1] Building on Ugolini's 2011 questioning of whether the Italian-Scottish community has been romanticized in the popular imagination to promote postwar integration, it proposes a new line of inquiry into the ways in which the changing memories are articulated in cultural production, focusing on a comparative analysis of Italian-Welsh and Italian-Scottish writing in a sustained way for the first time. These contemporary

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family memoirs and novels represent an attempt to distil the experiences of multiple generations, filtered through one narrative voice and articulating (to differing extents) competing perspectives and accounts of the interwar period. Drawing on Bakhtin's (2002) concepts of polyphony and heteroglossia, the article analyses whether the voices which populate these texts permit the emergence of a multiplicity of languages and ideologies, challenging the dominant narrative of the British-Italian experience of interwar fascistization and World War Two that has prevailed since 1945. These questions of who can remember for a community, which voices are privileged and whether other narratives are allowed to emerge or are repressed in order to create a cohesive means of remembering have, over the past two decades, become significant not just for the Italian-Scottish and Italian-Welsh communities but for many groups across Europe re-negotiating memories of the war.[2]

Re-imagining memories of fascism in Europe

Lebow (2006: 25) suggests that the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union served as catalysts for a reconsideration of wartime issues and an interrogation of the national myths that had been constructed, such as the Swiss national self-image of benign humanitarians who used neutrality to help others, the Polish self-image of martyrdom, and a collective French vision of the war that privileged national resistance over memories of Vichy. In Italy, the fall of the Berlin wall possessed added agency, as it led to the collapse of the traditional political parties and to the historic victory in 1994 of Berlusconi's centre-right coalition that, for the first time since the war, brought a neo-fascist party, the Alleanza nazionale (National Alliance), into power. This, Ventresca (2006a) suggests, led to an unmooring from certain versions of the past, and in particular from the founding myth of postfascist Italy of the nation as anti-fascist, with all blame vested in the sole figure of Mussolini. The Italian postwar memory of fascism was characterized, Fogu argues, by 'a very active process of forgetting' (Fogu 2006: 150), that suggested that 'if anything, Italians had been the victims of nazifascismo (Nazi Fascism) and bore no sense of responsibility for their fascist past' (Fogu 2006: 147), a view challenged by De Felice's (1974) *Gli anni del consenso* [The Years of Consensus].[3] The 'fundamental banality of goodness' (Fogu 2006: 147) of the Italian character that absolved them from fascism also extended to the Italian colonial past, where the image of the 'Italiani brava gente' ('the Italian good guys'), more benign than other colonial powers, dominated until the 1980s and 1990s when historians such as Angelo Del Boca and Nicola Labanca were able to access archives containing evidence which was able to 'demolire ogni mito del "bono italiano"' ['demolish every myth of the "good Italian"'] (Del Boca 2002: 113).[4]

Although memories of fascism and the Italian colonial past both begin with denial of any wrongdoing, the paths of public memory of the two phenomena do not necessarily converge. Labanca (2005) identifies three periods of colonial memory, encompassing immediate forgetting in the 1940s and 1950s, a resurgence of the myth of the *Italiani brava gente* in the 1960s and 1970s, and a consensus (despite entrenched opposition from a few voices) in the 1980s and 1990s that Italian colonialism was no more benign than that of other powers. Memories of the fascist era, however, are intrinsically entwined with a memory of the resistance, with the resistance embodying different values at different moments in time. Fogu (2006) identifies four periods in the memorialization of the resistance: the 'second Risorgimento' from 1945 to 1960, the 'missed revolution' from 1960 to 1975, the 'civil war' from 1975 to 1990, and 'the death of the fatherland' from 1990 to the present. The general trend has seen 'a foggy grey mist descending on the Resistance' (Mammone 2006: 213) as fascism and those who took part in the regime have been rehabilitated (Ventresca 2006a). Italian-British remembering of fascism has also been recently challenged, but in this case not through dialogue with changing perceptions of the resistance, but rather in response to its own specific set of dynamics.

Remembering fascism and the war in the Italian-British community

Italian-British memories of fascism are filtered through three factors: the articulation and mediation of fascism through the *fasci* (Italian government-sponsored fascist associations) in Britain in the interwar period; the events of the war (notably internment and the loss of life occasioned with the sinking of the *Arandora Star* in 1940); and the need to assimilate into the postwar British community.

Italian fascism emerged in Britain in the 1920s and grew through the 1930s, two decades dubbed a 'golden era' (Colpi 1991: 71) for Italians in the UK as they became settled and prosperous, for the most part well-integrated into communities through their catering establishments, particularly popular with the Temperance Movement (Hughes 1991: 51). In 1921, the London *fascio* was one of the first to be established abroad, swiftly followed by the growth of others in major British cities (Sponza 2000: 28). Membership of the organizations mirrored that of the Partito Nazionale Fascista [Fascist Party] in Italy: mainly small, successful entrepreneurs, often leaders of the community (Ugolini 2011: 60). Through the *fasci*, the ten million Italians living overseas gained new prestige. The *Guida generale degli italiani in Gran Bretagna*, a handbook issued to all Italians in the UK by the Embassy, reminded Italians

that Mussolini himself had given them a new name, 'Italiani all'estero' [Italians abroad], and they were 'non più come una volta appendice staccato dalla Patria' [no longer as before an appendix cut off from the fatherland], but now 'marciano sereni e sicuri all'ombra dei labari romani' [they march serene and confident under the Roman colours] (*Guida Generale* 1936: 4).

Although 'the fundamental mission of the Italian *fasci* abroad was the fascistization of emigrants' communities' (Baldoli 2004: 148), the political function of the *fasci* has been historically downplayed, with emphasis placed on the social and cultural elements of the organizations (clubs, Italian lessons, subsidized trips to Italy). Colpi argues that when British-Italians embraced fascism 'in a whole-hearted manner', fascism was 'to them a form of patriotism. They were not political and their involvement with the party was primarily due to an attachment to their country and their involvement in the Italian community' (1993: 169), whilst Hughes suggests that members of the *fasci* in Wales 'may not have been fully aware of the political aims behind them, or may not have cared' (1991: 89).[5] Church support for the *fasci*, and the linking of traditional Catholic holidays with fascist events (such as holding the annual fascist reunion on the Feast of the Assumption) furthered this belief (Sponza 2000: 41–45). Ugolini challenges the way in which British-Italian historiography has underplayed the 'propaganda and controlling function of the clubs' (2011: 55), which have been viewed as simply social forums, and argues that the wartime experience 'has effectively forestalled any critical debate on the meaning of Fascism in the Italian community and smothered expressions or articulations of difference' (2011: 81). Before turning to a case-study of texts that suggest such articulations of difference are now emerging, a brief survey of the wartime experiences and the postwar need to assimilate will map out the context for earlier cultural expressions of Italian (non)fascism.

The political role of the *fasci* was afforded differing significance by various branches of government. For MI5, the War Office and the military, membership represented a clear-cut dividing line of allegiance, whereas the Foreign Office, while not dismissing the importance of membership, recognized it as a poor indicator of loyalty (Sponza 1993: 139). However, following Italy's declaration of war on 10 June 1940, and Churchill's order to 'collar the lot', in 'a mixture of prudence and panic' (Hughes 1991: 93), the order was given to intern as enemy aliens all Italian males aged between eighteen and seventy, rather than just the 1,500 or so Italians regarded as dangerous by the War Cabinet on 30 May.[6] Ugolini challenges the 'almost ritualistic use of the term "collar the lot!"' (2011: 110), arguing that it provides the erroneous impression that all Italians shared the same fate. She notes that 4,300 Italians were interned out of a population of approximately 20,000,

held in camps around the UK.[7] The general reticence to discuss the period of internment, common to all internees in the postwar period as they sought to minimize their outsider status and blend into the sense of national identity, was exacerbated in the Italian case by the loss of life on the *Arandora Star* (Kushner and Ceserani 1993: 5–7). Bearing internees from Britain to Canada, the ship was torpedoed by a German U-boat on 2 July 1940, occasioning the loss of over 700 lives, of whom between 446 and 486 were Italian (figures are imprecise as internees exchanged places on different boats in order to sail with loved ones). The victims originated from across the UK; however, in proportional terms the biggest impact was on the Welsh valley communities (Sponza 1993: 179).

Cultural remembering of fascism in Britain

Ugolini (2011) suggests that the *Arandora Star* tragedy – and in particular recent memorialization initiatives – have led to narratives of victimhood being embraced, and a figuring of all those who died as 'innocent victims' when in fact many were politically motivated. This, in addition to the way that 'in Scotland, those who have emerged as guardians of communal history are often the families of those most involved in the *fasci*', has limited critical examination of engagement with fascism in the interwar period (Ugolini 2011: 65). The following brief outline of the cultural representations of British-Italian identity, underpinned by an overarching narrative of blameless internment, suggest that Ugolini's analysis of Scotland has resonances across the UK. The dominance of this narrative illustrates the importance of questioning whether different voices are beginning to emerge in the Welsh-Italian and Scottish-Italian texts analysed in the case-study below.

The most recent memorialization campaign of the *Arandora Star* took place in Wales in 2010,[8] leading to the unveiling of a plaque in Cardiff Cathedral commemorating the victims and to the production of a website and a forty-eight page booklet.[9] The booklet embeds recollections of internees and testimonials from second- and third-generation Welsh-Italians in a brief note on the war, a tri-lingual (English, Welsh and Italian) overview of the campaign and bibliographies of the committee. Combining sparse factual notes recalling a relative's name and whether he survived the tragedy with long, poetic accounts, the testimonies converge into a single narrative of blameless internment.[10] Idealization of family members is naturally present, such as the father who could read and write English perfectly when he arrived from Italy aged seven (testimony of Mary Strinati, *Arandora Star* 2010: 33). However, this romanticization extends to the authorizing editorial voices of patrons and committee members, framing the accounts not only with selected historical

facts but also with the description of the Italian community as one of the '*natural* and important units of an integrated society' (Patron Roy Noble, *Arandora Star* 2010: 22, my emphasis). Selectivity of material is unacknowledged, strikingly in the use of Victor Spinetti's memoir *Up Front!* (2006) to authenticate and validate the testimonies. The booklet cites Spinetti's memories of his father being taken away and his analysis of the 'collar the lot' policy, presenting selected extracts from across a chapter (Spinetti 2006: 19-22) as an integral testimony; this decontextualization provides a quite different reading from the original text, which frames the events with his father's swift release following the intervention of the local community, a teacher's actions to save him from anti-Italian bullying tactics, and comic interludes. Such editing is accompanied by the unproblematic acceptance of contradictory memories as unquestioned truth, as in the case of Mary Basini, who acknowledges that she and her eight-month old twin were unaware of their father's arrest in 1940, yet insists that they missed 'the father *we knew*' (*Arandora Star* 2010: 34, my emphasis). These all converge to create a single narrative of loss and apoliticality.

The disconnect between Italians and their status as 'enemy aliens' is subtly reinforced by the absence of references to the deaths of Italian prisoners of war with the sinking of the *Laconia* (12 September 1942), the *Nova Scotia* (28 November 1942) and the *Empress of Canada* (13 March 1943). Sponza (2000) has shown that there are striking similarities between the factors which exacerbated the death toll in these tragedies and those in the *Arandora Star* disaster – such as keeping Italians below deck with no access to lifeboats – factors commonly raised in the *Arandora Star* memorial campaigns, but not with reference to these other cases. This is at least partly explained by the fact that the victims were Italian rather than British-Italians, but the silence around the fate of Italians as enemy combatants is significant nonetheless.

Tensions between an external insistence on apoliticality and a more complex subtext are evident from one of the first articulations of the British-Italian war experience. *Memories of 1940: Impressions of Life in an Internment Camp by V. Rev Mgr. Gaetano Rossi* states unequivocally that the many Italians that Rossi administered to in the internment camps 'had never been Fascists, simply Italians' (Rossi and Millar 1991: 12), yet observes that the internees conflate the fascist hymn *Giovinezza* with Italianness (58).[11] Such dissonance is also evident in one of the major voices of the Italian-Scottish community, Joe Pieri. Ugolini (2011) identifies Pieri as one of the chief architects of the single narrative of blameless internment, yet a close reading of his texts reveals a more complex picture. In *River of Memory* (2006: 34), Pieri initially identifies the period from 1935 to 1940 as 'the only period in my life that I

felt completely integrated into my Scottish environment and gave no thought to my origins or place in a Scottish environment'. Later on he claims that 'the war seemed to have broadened attitudes and increased people's tolerance. Paradoxically, after all that had happened, for the first time in my life I began to feel welcome and part of the society in which I lived' (Pieri 2006: 76). This belonging is then denied as 'the only persons with whom I could be utterly and unreservedly at ease were those Scots-Italians of my own generation who had shared in my war-time experience' (Pieri 2006: 114).[12] Aside from the problem of accurate recall, narratives of the past are not static but evolve and are subject to change with each retelling.[13] There can be multiple remembered selves, whose evocation depends on the nature of the trigger (Lebow 2006), underlining the importance of polyphony in speaking for the community.

Other accounts of British-Italian life promote this depoliticized and sanitary view of Italians, through both form and content. Family stories of migration, such as those by Arcari (2010), Contini (2002, 2006) and Pelosi (2005), focus on the relationships of characters and in telling the story of their struggles edit out material suffering, creating a simplistic, romanticized Italy embodied by glorious food and picturesque landscapes, devoid of the hardship that drove migration (Wren-Owens 2012). This is reinforced by paratext, with Contini in particular peppering her works with recipes, hand-drawn maps and photographs, inserting the books into an easy-reading category endorsed by *Homes and Gardens* and *Sainsbury's Magazine*. Tanner's *Carlo's Ice Cream Parlour and Tea Rooms* (2011) is even more of a coffee-table book, with glossy pages bordered with an Italian flag overlaid by a Union Jack design, colour photographs of Italian tourist destinations which have no connection whatsoever with the story, and an account of Marco Polo discovering pasta in China. If the Italian story is not located in a vision of a hard-working entrepreneur maintaining close links to a quaint and picturesque rural culinary heartland, it figures as an extra hook in an account of celebrity life, as in the case of Spinetti (2006) and Elena Salvoni and Fawke's (1990) *Elena: A Life in Soho*. The sanitized view of the Italian community that is produced in these texts is brought into sharp relief by contrast with Forte's 2012 *La Londra degli italiani*, which in discussing the prevalence of drug use by Italians in 1980s London tells a different story from that of hardworking entrepreneurs favoured by the other texts, and is tellingly aimed at a very different market. This panorama of Italian-British writing demonstrates the attempt to create a single narrative of the war, but with evidence of dissonance emerging. The case-study of Arcari and Contini will examine the extent to which polyphony characterizes two of the most recent articulations of the war experience.

Case-study: Arcari and Contini

The Hokey Pokey Man (Arcari 2010) and *Dear Olivia* (Contini 2006) provide a useful comparative case-study of the dominance of a single narrative in the current Italian-Welsh and Italian-Scottish cultural articulations of the interwar experience. A comparative analysis of these female-authored texts, strikingly similar in subject matter and form, is especially useful as Ugolini (2011) has pointed to a particular silence around women's accounts of the era. From a comparative perspective, the convergences between the texts are remarkable as Arcari's work represents one of the first articulations of Italian-Welsh identity, despite an established Italian presence in Wales since 1900 (Wren-Owens 2012), whereas Contini's text fits into a more established canon of Italian-Scottish narrative.[14] Both authors express a strong desire to tell the story of the Italian experience, Contini explicitly through paratext and Arcari in interviews (Wren-Owens 2011, 2012).

Analysing these texts through the lens of polyphony, and in particular Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia, requires an assumption that they can be treated as novels. Arcari's *Hokey Pokey Man* (2010) narrates Tino's childhood and thwarted young love in Picinisco, Italy, his migration to London and then to Swansea, his accomplishments in the commercial world as he moves from itinerant ice-cream seller in London to owning his own catering establishments in Wales, and his experience of the two wars. The text is marketed as a family memoir, but is driven chiefly through research and imagination, combining snippets remembered from conversations with Arcari's migrant grandfather, with intensive historical research into the typical migrant trajectory, and a rich novelistic imagination (Wren-Owens 2011). Contini's text also narrates the migration of poor Italians from the Picinisco area at the turn of the twentieth century, and their achievements in building catering businesses in Edinburgh (Alfonso and Maria Crolla's family) and Cockensie (Cesidio and Marietta Contini's family) and the experiences of the generations that follow, especially during the two wars. Like Arcari, Contini presents a family saga, but paratext in *Dear Olivia*, including photographs, a foreword and acknowledgements, all emphasize the fact that the text is based on true stories communicated directly to the author (daughter of Marietta), and cross-referenced for accuracy (Contini 2006: foreword, acknowledgements).[15] The foreword positions the text as a guardian of communal (family) history as the elder generations pass away. The claim to be telling true stories seems to undermine the positioning of Contini's text as a novel; however, the death of some of the major characters during the war, with Contini having to construct their final stories herself, ensures that the text is woven together with imagination. Indeed the re-telling of stories in one's own words, 'double-voiced narration' (Bakhtin 2002: 341),

represents one of the three aspects of the speaking person and his discourse that Bakhtin argues form the 'fundamental condition' of the novel (Bakhtin 2002: 232). Bakhtin (2002: 334) further defines a novel by the existence of many belief systems, with the hero generally acting within his own system, and such multiplicity is key to allowing multiple narratives of the interwar period to surface in these texts.

Bakhtin's (2002: 262–63, 311) polyphonic discourse entails a multiplicity of language and verbal-ideological belief systems – social dialects, professional jargons, languages of generations or social groups – all incorporated into the novel, often not related to fixed persons but instead incorporated into an impersonal form, from the author. Disguised indirect speech may be used to parody certain languages, where words take on the flavour of someone else's language when appearing in the narrator's dialogue (Bakhtin 2002: 305). In this dialogue of languages, the author may remain a third party in a quarrel between two people, but crucially may remain a biased third party (Bakhtin 2002: 314). Above all, Bakhtin's heteroglossia represents '*another's speech in another's language*, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of *double-voiced discourse*. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking and the refracted intention of the author' (Bakhtin 2002: 324, original emphasis).

Contini's text as a whole is rich in multiplicity of languages and ideological belief systems, incorporated through the language of specific characters and embedded in the narrative voice, and it is valuable to survey these in order to contextualize the polyphony characterizing the discussion of inter-war fascistization. The language of rural Italy and traditional values is embodied in village elder Tadon Michele's speech (Contini 2006: 52). The language of the pulpit is evident through the sermons and also embedded in the narrative voice when Alfonso returns from World War One and we learn that 'his belief in God became the Truth. There had to be a higher reason behind this futile waste' (Contini 2006: 123). The discourse of British officialdom pervades the narrative voice as Alfonso and his brother arrive at Customs at Dover, and 'the immigration officer in the hall was impressed with Alfonso's papers. Not only was Alfonso coming to work in his well-established eponymous business, he had the means to support his brother as well' (Contini 2006: 75).

Languages (Italian and English) and dialects are used to signify (un) belonging in sometimes unexpected ways. Characters speak dialect/Italian when they wish to prevent others from understanding them, speaking in the local Fontitune dialect as they travel north in Italy, and speaking Italian in Britain in order to maintain privacy (Contini 2006: 67, 273, 274, 359–60).[16]

Most of the Italian used in the text is translated or explained, but not all, which either implies an Italophone reader, an exoticization of the Italian language, or an attempt to remind the reader that for Italians like Maria, who had little English before arriving, language can be an exclusionary barrier to understanding. Scottish dialect, conversely, is used to signify belonging, particularly the assimilation and integration of Cesidio and Marietta's family in Cockensie. Their son Alex learns of Italy's declaration of war when told 'Alex, you'd better go hame son. That's Mussolini declared war', with the official declaration announced on the radio filtered through the voice of the local dialect (Contini 2006: 343).

A high level of polyphony appears to dominate the discussion of the interwar fascistization. The official discourse of fascism is present, through the speeches of the local fascist representatives (Contini 2006: 182–85) and internalized in Alfonso's voice as he incorporates fascist ideology and language into his own speech. Speaking to Maria, Alfonso reproduces the fascist version of Mussolini's rise to power: 'in October he marched on Rome with his supporters and offered his services to the king. He says Italy needs a strong leader who will put backbone into the country and avert civil war…. He will be a great man, Maria, he will be Italy's Saviour' (Contini 2006: 193). Whilst Alfonso takes a leading role in the *fascio*, dissent is voiced through the character of Marietta (Contini's mother), who dissociates herself from fascism by speaking to Alfonso of 'your Mussolini' and by refusing to donate her wedding ring to a fascist collection for funds (Contini 2006: 232, 269). What is most interesting about the text is the way in which the narrative voice manages to bring these two distinct beliefs together into one vision, of fascism as harmless but seductive. Alfonso's enthusiasm is framed by authorial comment, such as 'if Alfonso had had any idea of the allegiances that would form between this murderer [Hitler] and Alfonso's hero, Mussolini, he would have been *devastated*. Like thousands of others he was *hoodwinked* by the positive propaganda that Mussolini generated. *Innocently* he encouraged many others to follow suit' (Contini 2006: 247, my emphasis). Strikingly, the authorial voice, even when superficially condemning Alfonso's admiration for Mussolini, subtly tempers criticism with comparisons to Hitler, subtly insinuating the idea of *italiani brava gente*. This is supported by the depiction of fascism in Italy as where 'the absurd became the ridiculous', focusing on laws against women wearing trousers (Contini 2006: 225) rather than the serious infringements of civil liberties enforced by the regime.

Even while outwardly condemning fascism, the authorial voice incorporates enthusiasm and admiration for the movement and for Mussolini in particular, for example showing real eagerness when reporting that

> there would be Italian lessons for the children, funds for the widows and orphans and money to organise dances and *feste* [parties]. On Ferragosto, 15 August, the Consul was going to organise a big picnic for all the immigrants in Scotland and have a sports day for the children and a dance at night. Mussolini himself was even going to send them a silver cup to present to the winners! (Contini 2006: 198)

It is also evident in the reports of young Olivia's holiday to Italy. Descriptions of the children addressing their parents with a Roman salute and a 'military stamp' of their feet, dressed 'like miniature soldiers' and as 'soldati d'Italia' ['soldiers of Italy'] marching for half an hour each morning 'to booming military tunes', challenges previous assertions of the *fasci*'s apolitical nature (Contini 2006: 290–95). More striking is the assertion that the children respond '*in unison, enthusiastic and completely without prompting*' to Mussolini's question 'a chi la vittoria?' [who shall be victorious?] with 'a noi Duce, a noi!'[we shall, Duce, we shall!] (Contini 2006: 297, my emphasis). The authorial voice mirrors Olivia's enthrallment with Mussolini when narrating the moment when she meets him and (like all the young girls around her) become enraptured by him (Contini 2006: 297). Olivia herself has internalized the rhetoric, adapting Mussolini's mantra to cheer on the Edinburgh tug-of-war team at the annual picnic with the cry of 'gioventù d'Edimburgo … a chi la vittoria?' [Young people of Edinburgh … who shall be victorious?] (Contini 2006: 312).

The experience of internment is interestingly shown from a female perspective, with the women left to run the businesses while the men are interned. This provides a different viewpoint from that in texts by Pieri and Rossi, one in which 'exhaustion and depression' and 'a sense of hopelessness' trump any discussion of political allegiance (Contini 2006: 378). When Cesidio is arrested, despite not being involved in the *fascio*, he and his family are protected by the local community, whilst Alfonso's premises are attacked by anti-Italian rioters (Contini 2006: 364, 354). In the camps, both Cesidio and Alfonso are termed 'harmless shopkeepers' (Contini 2006: 379), and the starkly contrasting involvement of the two men in the *fascio* subtly shows the difficulty in using such a blanket term for all internees.

Contini's text is fascinating both for its attempts to admit multiplicity of responses to fascism and to explore the draw of fascism for its adherents whilst voicing dissenting views, and also for the way in which the authorial voice externally seeks to converge the voices into a single vision of harmless fascism, yet becomes infected by the enthusiasm of Alfonso and Olivia. Contini, whilst giving voice to different ideologies and languages, is the '*biased* third party' who refracts the voices (Bakhtin 2002: 314, original emphasis).

Arcari's text portrays responses to fascism in a much more polarized fashion, with the authorial voice remaining far more fixed in its perspective. Whilst Contini gives space to the official fascist discourse through the speeches of fascist leaders and through Alfonso's internalization of the discourse, in Arcari fascism is voiced only through the character of Beppe, Tino's brother-in-law. Beppe, like Alfonso, lists the social benefits of the *fascio*, but his embrace of fascism results in a family rift as he lies about his activities and then rejects those who do not support fascism (Arcari 2010: 311–13, 324). Whereas Contini's narrative voice incorporates Alfonso's enthusiasm, Olivia's awe and Maria's derision, Arcari's narrative voice merges solely with Tino's. Although the text is not written as a first-person narrative, there is no discernible difference between Tino's viewpoint that trying to dissuade Beppe was futile (Arcari 2010: 214) and the authorial view that 'Beppe had been well and truly indoctrinated…. Beppe was a simple man, he could only see the obvious, the superficial things that were being done for them' (Arcari 2010: 314). They are only differentiated by the addition of contextual material that Tino could not have known, that gives extra weight to his view: 'he [the fascist official] failed to tell them about the thousands of Italian citizens at home and abroad who were being manipulated like puppets, courted and flattered with one purpose, to use them as political pawns in an uncertain future' (Arcari 2010: 314). Thus rather than give voice to the official fascist representative, Arcari articulates the silence of what is not told to the community. The convergence of the authorial voice with Tino's is perhaps not surprising. The novel is Tino's story, with Arcari trying to reconnect to her family through an imagined reconstruction of an ancestor (Wren-Owens 2012), rather than articulate a communal and polyphonic family narrative as Contini aims to do.

Tino's wholehearted rejection of fascism is based on differentiating between Italianness and fascism in ways that Beppe (and Alfonso) do not. Tino

> loved Italy as much as Beppe did, but it had done little for him – everything he owned now he had worked hard for. He was a loyal and grateful citizen in his adopted country of Great Britain, and while Italy would always be dear in his heart, he had found more in Wales that he had ever done in his homeland. (Arcari 2010: 315)

The view of Tino as completely integrated into the community is illustrated by his actions – such as joining the Air Raid Precautions volunteers – and is highlighted by the response of his customers when Tino's café is attacked upon Italy's declaration of war on Britain:

> Between them [three of Tino's customers] they nailed and sawed, fixed furniture and windows, mended the doors and partitions, until it was hard to tell it was any different from before. The three men wanted to show the D'Abruzzos who their real friends were, desperate to make up for the indignities and devastation that not only Dai and his gang, but the British government, had heaped upon him and his fellow countrymen. (Arcari 2010: 351)

Thus the outsiders in the text are equally Beppe the fascist and Dai the anti-Italian, as neither is given space to speak with the discourse dominated by the converging voices of Tino, the narrative voice, and Tom, Tino's staunch friend. As in Contini's text, where the fascist Alfonso and the non-fascist Cesidio perish on the *Arandora Star*, in Arcari's novel, Beppe and Michele, a non-fascist, drown (Arcari 2010: 347–49). In Arcari's novel, the two men unite as the ship goes down, but the event is not central to the text in the way that it is to Contini's, where the two major characters are lost. Arcari's text focuses more on the D'Abruzzo family's contribution to the British war effort and allows much less space for polyphonic discourse. This is not because the response to fascism and war was more uniform in Wales: claims registered at a Cardiff tribunal for conscientious objection on the grounds of Italian relatives serving in the Italian army suggest that Tino's approach was by no means universal (Nicholson 2007).

Some conclusions

Revisiting the fascist period and its legacy depend on the privileging – and silencing – of certain voices and perspectives. The case-studies in this article illustrate that just as the dominant narratives of the wartime experience in Italy – and indeed across Europe – have been called into question, so too are fissures emerging in the single narrative of blameless internment that characterized the British-Italian experience of the 1930s and 1940s. The texts reveal that this is not a uniform process, but one which is differentiated and nuanced. Arcari's text, the most elaborate articulation of Italian-Welsh identity (Wren-Owens 2012), as a novel which, although grounded in historical research, is chiefly a work of imagination, allows for a less dialogic relationship between ideologies and perspectives, thus enabling a discourse of deeply integrated Italianness and a rejection of interwar fascistization to continue to dominate. This mirrors the memorialization campaign in Wales, which selectively permits a single narrative to emerge, albeit through multiple voices, reinforcing a pattern of who is allowed to speak for the community. Contini's text, also claiming to speak for multiple generations, strikingly provides a wider polyphonic panorama, 'a historical and concrete plenitude of actual social-historical languages that in a given era have entered into

interaction' (Bakhtin 2002: 412). Such polyphony thus represents a limited but significant challenge to the dominant discourse of Italian internment that Ugolini (2011) has shown to characterize the Italian-Scottish community and an important break with a communal history guarded by a specific male voice and experience embodied by writers such as Pieri. A stronger homogenization in the Welsh context may in part be due to a later emergence of Italian-Welsh narrative (Wren-Owens 2012) and a diminished need to challenge established discourse. In the case of Arcari, it also reflects a strong identification with an idealized vision of Italy and the Italian contribution to Wales (Wren-Owens 2012). Ugolini's (2011) view that the Italian-Scottish community has been romanticized and celebrated uncritically may be extended to the community in the UK as a whole, yet Contini's text disrupts the dominance of a single narrative. The texts reveal a differentiated willingness to challenge an established narrative and to question the sanitized version of the interwar era that has been allowed to dominate. Such difference resonates with the competing visions of what fascism – and resistance to fascism – mean in contemporary Italy.

Notes

1. British-Italian history has been documented in detail by Baldoli (2003); Colpi (1991); Hughes (1991); Colpi (1993); Sponza (1993); Sponza (2000); Ugolini (2011).
2. See for example Cooke (2011); Ben Ghiat (2004); Pavone (2004); Pezzino (2005); Fogu (2006); Golsan (2006); Lebow (2006); Ludi (2006); Mammone (2006); Ventresca (2006a and 2006b).
3. Corner (2012) further explores recent debates on consensus towards the regime.
4. Del Boca (2002: 120) notes that he was called anti-Italian, a liar and an enemy of the military for his 1965 text La Guerra d'Abissina 1935-41 [The War in Abyssinia 1935-41] and his 1979 work Gli italiani in Africa Orientale: La conquista dell'impero [The Italians in East Africa: The Conquest of an Empire]. See Labanca (2002), and the collections of essays in Ben Ghiat and Fuller (2005) and Andall and Duncan (2005) for an introduction to the revisioning of Italian colonial memory.
5. Sponza (1993: 140) similarly argues that Fascist activists 'succeeded in making Fascism synonymous with Italian patriotism'.
6. For a discussion of the local differences in the way these orders were carried out, and on responses from the local community, see Sponza (2000: 75–93); Sponza (1993); Ugolini (2011: 90–143); and Hughes (1991: 84–198).
7. Ugolini (2011: 90–110) compares the policies of internment in the UK with those in America, Canada and Australia.

8. The first memorial was placed in St Peter's Church, London, in 1960, and 'after a relative silence of over seven decades, it would appear that all corners of the British map are making competing claims for ownership of the tragedy' (Ugolini 2011: 230).
9. The website is www.arandorastarwales.us, and the booklet can be downloaded from the site, or purchased in hard copy. It is edited by Paulette Pelosi and David Evans, but will be referred to as 'Arandora Star' in future references for clarity.
10. Contrast for example the brief statement by Gerald Dimarco with the long discourse by Paulette Pelosi (Arandora Star 2010: 26, 27–28).
11. An earlier, slightly different, Italian version was published in La voce degli italiani in Gran Bretagna.
12. Pieri also reflects on his internment in Isle of the Displaced (1997).
13. Wren-Owens (2012) analyses the significance of the interplay between class, Italian and Celtic identities in Pieri.
14. For a discussion of the delayed emergence of Italian-Welsh narrative, see Wren-Owens (2012) and for an analysis of Italian-Scottish cultural identity, see Rose and Rossini (2000).
15. Paratext in Dear Francesca (Contini 2002) also includes complex family trees and hand-drawn maps.
16. Almost all of the language noted as dialect in the text is in fact standard Italian (Contini 2006: 67, 174, 259–60, 359–60).

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